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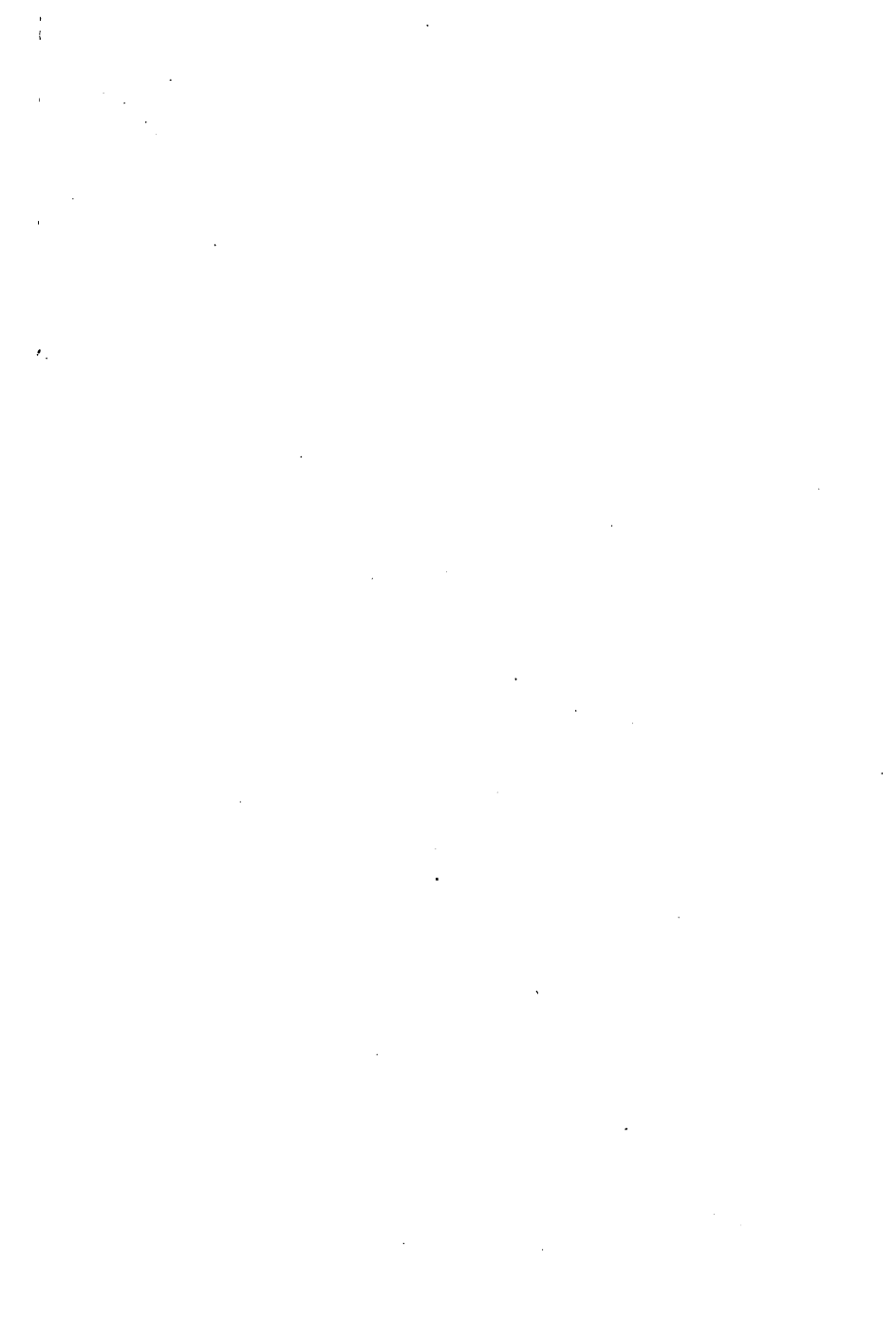


• AN AUTO •
BIOGRAPHY
EDWARD PEUPLE

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NCW
People





**"SHE CAME RIGHT UP TO ME AND PLACED
ONE LITTLE HAND ON MY
RADIATOR CAP"**

An Auto-Biography

A Tale of Truth—And Ruth

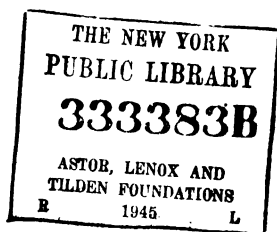
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EDWARD PEPLE

AUTHOR OF "A NIGHT OUT,"
"THE LITTLEST REBEL," ETC.

NEW YORK
MOFFAT, YARD & COMPANY
1915

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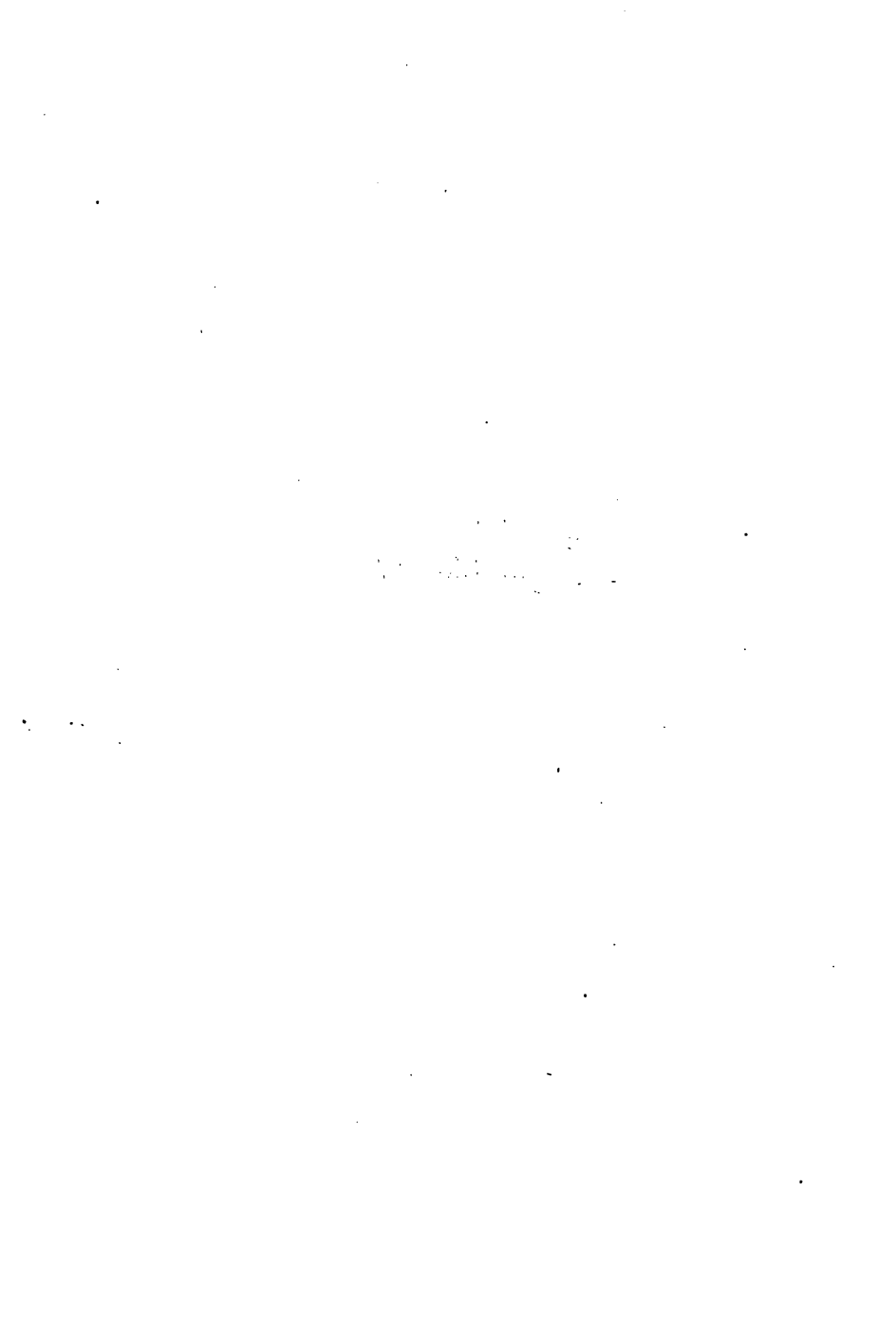
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**AN
AUTO-BIOGRAPHY**

Buck Rarr-Good. Chap
NOV 28 1955



AN AUTO - BIOGRAPHY

CHAPTER I

 I AM AN AUTO! When I make that statement, I do so with a full knowledge gleaned from the bumps of personal experience; therefore I speak with some authority.

I was born in Detroit. This fact alone may not inspire you with any marked degree of jealousy, yet portions of this history may, at least, prove interesting.

My earliest and faintest recollection is that of a great noisy, smoky machine shop, littered with iron monsters of torture; some hot, some cold, but each designed for the making of an

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auto's parts. I did not know this at the time. I was conscious only of continuous, racking pain. Certain portions of me were being hammered and twisted and filed and drilled and welded into proper shape; then, after a while, these portions were taken to another torture chamber, known technically as the "assembling shop," and a *second* dull, blurred agony began.

I was put together. One part would be bolted or riveted to another part, and fitted with such horrible tightness that I tried to scream; yet, presently, the pain subsided, and I felt, sub-consciously, that the greasy, profane creatures, who were beat-

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ing and maltreating me, did so with a definite object. Thereafter my sense of curiosity was aroused.

I could not see as yet, and could hear but faintly; still, I knew I was *something* — but WHAT? I had wheels and connecting rods and valves and cylinders and a mass of other mysterious contrivances; but no life, no brains, no heart! Then a fellow came along and greased me.

He filled two orifices, which I afterwards learned were my transmission and differential. He poured oil into my crank case, then poked a sharp pointed can into each and every one of my

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ticklish joints. It felt nasty at first, but I soon began to like it, for the tight feeling all over me gradually subsided.

Then the same fellow poured a vast quantity of cool, smelly liquid into the middle of my stomach. It must have been some sort of "dope," for the moment it was in me, I experienced my first sensation of actual life. It was like blood in a human's veins! Like wine that is waiting for the cork to pop! And that is just what happened. It popped!

I was taken to a kind of table, and bolted down; then a human got on my back and began to manipulate my levers with his

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hands and feet—and then it happened!

Something inside of me groaned and turned, slowly at first, then faster and faster, while funny little jumpy sparks ran up and down my astonished person. They tickled a little and hurt a good deal, and I was just on the point of protest, when—
crash!

I must have yelled bloody murder, but at the time I was too confused for intelligent recollection. At any rate, I blew up—exploded—and I kept *on* blowing up at regular intervals. One, two, three, four! One, two, three, four! It was horrible! Terrifying! Like life and death

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all tangled up together! My pipes were hot and scorched with living fire! I trembled and roared in agony! My wheels and shafts were running, jammed close together in a tight-locked, grinding maze, rough edge against rough edge, each turn a rasping, tearing wound. And then the oil began to flow!

It bubbled up from somewhere with a pleasing, pumping sound, and, take it from *me*, old dear, it did the business. It leaped at my cogs and softened their edges down. It eased my hot spots and trickled soothingly into every pain-racked joint I owned. It splashed and splashed, like a fountain of *youth*—and *love*!

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Gee, but I loved that oil! It made me feel cool, and sweet, and happy! Right then and there I made a vow that if ever the humans deprived me of my rightful share of oil, I was going to register a good, stiff kick.

And now I was working, steadily, and my fears began to fade. The explosions still went on inside of me, but I didn't mind them any more. They were part of the game—my pulse beats!—and they lent me the courage of life and power. Yes, that was what I was—a thing of life! And Power! Just what, I neither knew nor cared; and so I began to sing. No, it wasn't a song exactly, but rather a low,



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melodious hum, the purring of some huge, contented cat. Then I sat on that testing table and worked for ten sweet hours.

I wanted to work! I wanted to get my feet on the ground, and run! *That's* what I wanted—to *run!* Then it came to me—all of a sudden.

By Jupiter! *I was* an automobile!

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CHAPTER II

Y next recollection is that of being unbolted from the testing table and rolled into the carpenter and paint shop. I learned this later, for, as I was still without sight, I could only vaguely conjecture as to the various things which were continually being done to me. However, the one fixed fact that I was an auto helped my impatience for the romance and adventure which would one day be my happy lot.

My body was created. I felt it; and, with pardonable pride, I felt that it was being done

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well. Then they painted me. I could hear the brushes, slap, slap, as they went over and over me, giving me several thick, substantial coats.

It was the same feeling of serene happiness (so I have heard) that comes to a woman when she acquires a particularly stylish and perfectly fitting gown.

(N. B. I wonder if my simile will be entirely clear to the ladies? Yes? Thank you. But let's get back to the biography.)

I was given various and sundry highly polished nickel fittings. Then—glory be!—I was provided with five separate and distinct eyes.

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The two big ones in front were called head lights. The two smaller ones were known as side lamps, and the little red and green fellow at the rear I afterwards found to be an invaluable asset when dogs and trucks and motor-cycles and other infernal nuisances jumped at me suddenly from behind.

The head lights, however, were my joy and pride. These were the first two eyes I received, and with them I caught myself reflected in the polished body of another car across the aisle. I was painted a sweet, dark blue; a glossy, perfect coat. My trousers—I mean my trimmings—were of a slightly lighter shade,



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and from shoes to hood I seemed to reflect each ray of golden light that fell from the high glass roof.

There were other cars about me, fifty perhaps; but these were merely *cars*. Personally I was *the* car! IT!

Now, possibly, you may attribute this to vanity; yet in that first delightful moment of self - appreciative eyesight, it struck me that I was just about the *niftiest* little boat that ever ran on rubber!

It was rather a disappointment, though, ultimately to learn that *every* auto experiences a like sensation, and that even owners ofttimes entertain the

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same delusion; only, the owners retain it longer and believe in themselves more violently.

At any rate, I was supremely satisfied. I was now complete, and ready for all the future might unfold. Still, it *was* a trifle hard to just sit there and wait for it.

While waiting, an incident occurred which, while slight itself at the time, still proved to be of the utmost value. I was spoken to—by a strange car—without the formality of an introduction.

He was standing next to me, a much battered up old scoundrel, indescribably dirty, with one eye and a missing mud guard.

"Say, young feller," he re-

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marked, without any preamble whatever, "you's feelin' right smart swelled up. Now *ain't* yer!"

I glanced at him out of the corner of my side lamp, but, naturally, made no reply. The vulgar roadster disregarded my obvious slight and went straight on:

"That's right. Git huffy! Turn up yer little tin nose! Always the way with you durn aristocrats. Yer don't know nuthin'! an' yer thinks yer knows it all!"

He was silent for a moment, then added, sullenly:

"Jus' wanted to give yer a tip fer to put yer wise; but if

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yer don't *want* it, don't *take* it!
Go *on*—in yer own *way*—an'
butt yer brains out on the first
telegraft pole you come to. It
ain't none of *my* hearse-party!
Go to it—*an' spill yerself all over
the map!*"

Of course this was rank impertinence, mixed, possibly, with a little natural jealousy of my smart appearance; and yet, underlying it all, there seemed to be a germ of reason in the old skate's observations. Therefore, being a wise and intelligent little car, I thought it the part of wisdom to overlook his insulting familiarity and listen, at least, to what he had to say.

"Well?" I asked, in a tone of

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polite reserve, "what is the tip to which you have a reference?"

"Oh, nuthin' much," returned the big red vulgarian. "I ain't a-goin' to waste much *time* on you. But there's jus' two things. First, when you get out in the country, don't you begin admirin' of the scenery. *Keep yer eye on the road!* Get me?"

"Oh, yes," I answered lightly, with an air of one of long experience. "I understand you perfectly. What is your *other* treasure-trove of sapient advice?"

Of course he didn't understand me. How could he? But, anyway, he seemed to catch my meaning.

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"This here!" he growled.
"An' don't you pull no jokes about it. See that dinky little steerin' wheel in the front of yer drivin' seat? Well, yer do what it tells yer! Understand? Go straight ahead till yer feel it pinch yer in the ribs. Then turn! If it says turn right, *turn* right! If it says turn left, you *turn!*

"But, my dear, dear sir——"

"Now, never mind what yer think yerself. You listen to *me!* That steerin' wheel is the muck-a-muck—the *boss!*—an' yer got to do what it tells yer. I *didn't!* That's how I come to be in the horse-pittle."

Again he lapsed into silence,

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and this was the last word I ever got out of him. I did try to draw him into conversation several times, partly out of pity for his battered physical condition; but always he would open his one eye drowsily, then close it again without a syllable.

Suddenly I understood. He was looking *down* on me! The disgusting beast! The rotter! Just because he had had a little road experience, he was looking *down* on me! On *me!* the finest specimen of perfect mechanism that ever owed its young existence to the glittering metropolis of Detroit! Well, by *Gosh!* If it wasn't for spoiling my brand new paint, hanged if I wouldn't

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back up and kick the carburetor out of him!

I'd show him! Just wait till I got out on the road, and I'd *prove* whether a dinky little steering wheel was my boss or not! Dog-gone his spattered hide! Just wait till I got out on the ROAD!

Just here my angry reflections were interrupted by a low, nasty chuckle of amusement. I looked round sharply with all five of my eyes, but the shop was as silent as the tomb. As I said before, there were about fifty other cars in the place, so I failed to pick out the offender; still, I have always entertained a sneaking suspicion that the amused chuckle

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emanated from that disreputable one-eyed pile of junk directly on my left.

I was hot all over, even without my power; but I cooled down presently in the comforting consciousness of dignified personal superiority. The *person* had not *dared* to laugh a *second* time!

This closed the incident; then came another and a happier one. I was taken out for my trial run.

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CHAPTER III

ITh happened in the morn-
ing; the most beauti-
ful, fresh Spring morn-
ing that ever visited
the earth. The sun was
peeping through the high glass
roof. Outside the birds were
singing, and a cool breeze flut-
tered through the open doors.

The stage was set! The great
big world beyond my shop was
waiting—FOR ME!—and you
can bet your boots, my son, I
was ready for the dash!

My driver came in and sat
on me. I didn't like him at
first. He chewed tobacco, and
used profanity conversationally.



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However, I forgave him later, in his ability to drive.

He threw out my clutch, pressed an electric button, and my engine started instantly. It did not frighten me this time, for I knew the ropes; besides, my oil was splashing the moment the starter turned my engine over. He pressed my accelerator with his foot, in order to raise a little heat. I whirled and gave him what he asked. Again he threw out my clutch, and *slap!* the shift lever slid me into low gear, and I was ready!

The clutch was let in slowly. Something inside of me seemed to grip my driving shaft as in a mighty vise, and for an instant

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more I stood and trembled, my four eyes fixed upon the open doors!

And now I was moving! *Moving!* Oh, the joy! And yet, the disappointment! My cogs were making too much noise, a growling, protesting noise, and I didn't like it. Slap! Click! Slap! The shift lever went into second speed, and I started to roll—majestically!

How I ever got out of that door I have never known exactly. I was too excited. Yes, even to cast a parting glance of scorn at the old red roadster with his sleepy eye and the missing mud guard. But I was out! At last! In the open! With a

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smooth straight road before me
—and I wanted to jump at it
and run!

Still, I wasn't happy. At least, not perfectly. The protest of my cogs continued, and my speed was less by far than the light-footed rush of which I had fondly dreamed. Here was a road! A splendid, unobstructed road! Then why the devil—*Slap!* My lever was in high, and by the handle of the great horned spoon, I had come into my own!

I threw off every human care on earth and began to glide! Oh, the happiness! The sweet, unutterable relief! I was running easily, swiftly, with a feel-

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ing of reserve behind my power. My driver cursed me—horribly—yet in a gentle and purely impersonal tone of voice, pressed downward on my accelerator with his foot, and—well, I jumped!

Just here let me digress to remark that all chauffeurs and other garage people allude to the accelerator as an “exhilarator.” This is an error, of course; yet, judging from the pure delight that the little iron contrivance sprinkles all over you, I respectfully suggest *one* change in the English language.

At all events, I *was* exhilarated, to the smallest iron fibre of my being. I took the bit in my radiator, so to speak, and

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humped it. I didn't merely skim that road. I *ate* it! I passed a milk wagon as though it were standing still, and arranged permanently for the destiny of a hitherto perfectly good old rooster. I roared up a long, stiff hill without even taking notice, hummed over its crest and started down the grade at a mileage rate that made my speedometer want to take off its cap to me. Believe *me*, little one, I was some car! And just here I had the scare of my life thrown into me.

At the foot of the hill stood a solid, huge stone wall, and I was headed straight for it. I saw it with all four eyes, and tried to



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stop. I couldn't stop. I was going hell-for-leather! And, yes, I confess it freely, I lost my head. I felt a sharp pinching in my left ribs, but was far too terrified to heed it. I was going to hit that wall! I couldn't help it! There would be one hideous crunching, splintering crash. I would spill myself all over the map!

Ah! Then I remembered! In a flash! The advice—the patronizing, sullen advice of a battered, one-eyed roadster: “That steerin’ wheel is the muck-a-muck—the *boss*!—and yer got to do what it tells yer!” The pinch in my ribs had grown acute. I had to decide between

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odious advice and that big stone wall. I didn't like the wall, so I took the odious advice.

Gee whiz! I turned to the left and went around that curve in one of the most truly magnificent sweeps in history! But *had* I done it? Of *myself*? I *hadn't!*

"You dear, disreputable old one-eyed pile of junk! If ever I have the opportunity to apologize, I'll get down on my angle-irons and do it—like a gentleman!"

After this it was just about all right. I stopped looking at the scenery and listening to the twittering birds. I got down to business and kept my eye on the road.

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And my! what a driver that profane young person was! To run for him was not a task. It was a privilege! He tested my power and speed, but never at too fast a pace for the welfare of my youthful bearings. He applied my brake intelligently, and that, if you please, is an art which every owner should acquire. He didn't jam it on and make blisters on my brake bands; but applied it firmly, gradually, and I always slowed down with ease and thanked him for his courtesy.

I *liked* that driver. He drove me just as he cursed me, smoothly, sweetly, and never at a loss for what to do—or say.

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My next adventure came about in the crossing of a bridge. It was an iron bridge, covered with a loose board flooring. It sounded like an accident, and nearly scared the magneto out of me. Always after that the thunderous racket of a bridge amused me vastly. I seemed so joyfully destructive.

We started back for home. I did this because I felt a pinching in my ribs, and turned. Then I went into high once more and enjoyed myself. We were loafing along at thirty-five when we overtook a farmer's wagon, creeping, of course, and hogging the middle of the road. I was wondering what would happen

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if I hit that wagon, but just then my driver cursed me pleasantly and blew my electric horn.

"B-R-R-R-R-R—OU—AR!"

It wasn't the farmer who died; it was I! I jumped six feet and almost fell into the ditch, then swallowed my heart and passed a pair of horses who were practicing a tango. The farmer was cursing too, but he didn't do it pleasantly; so I kicked up a cloud of dust in his face and went on my way rejoicing.

My, but I'll never forget that run! The faster I went, the warmer I became; but the warmer I became, the faster whirled my fan and cooled me down, while the water in my jacket

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flowed and flowed and the oil splashed up and soothed me.

I took another curve, a sharp one, and had no fear at all. I loved that steering wheel! It wasn't like an order from a boss, but rather a warning love-touch from a friend. After this I learned to answer instantly, just as a human's feet will throw out a clutch and apply a brake at the first faint sniff of danger.

In going home we swung around to the other side of town, skimmed through the suburbs, then struck the traffic. *Wow!* Remember the first time you ever pushed your way through strange and crowded streets? It was like waking up suddenly to

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find the house on fire, and escaping in your night shirt. But that blasphemous young imp on my back didn't seem to mind it in the least. He would swear benignly, and push me through holes in the tangle of trucks and wagons where there didn't seem room for a greased cat.

There was only one thing that stopped him. I should say *things*. They stood at the crossings, blew whistles and raised their hands majestically; or waved us along with imperious gestures, as absolute as the pinch of a steering gear. I thought they were guardian angels. I was wrong. They were mostly Irish.




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Well, we got back home at last, circled the factory yard and rolled into the storage room. I turned on the floor, backed gracefully into a narrow aisle, and — *click!* — my engine died with a happy sigh.

I was flushed and happy and deliriously excited, so I went to sleep for three days. When I woke up again the romance of my pure young life began.

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CHAPTER IV

 WAS put on a freight car and shipped to New York. I was tired when I got there, and in rather a bad humor, so the trip uptown wasn't very exciting. They cleaned and polished me, and put me in the window of a hundred and eighty million dollar sales room on upper Broadway. Then all the people in the world came along and admired me.

I thought, at first, that this was romance; but it wasn't. You know, romance is an awfully funny thing. You start out on it and begin to enjoy it hugely,

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when suddenly a something—a great, mysterious something that is stronger even than a steering wheel—turns you off into a by-road and your engine chokes. Then again, when you are not thinking of romance at all, or are fast asleep—*bang!*—you are right in the middle of it. That's it! I guess romance must be a sort of back-fire.

I had a private salesman all to myself, a nice, easy-mannered young chap, and I liked him. He told the truth. I *knew* he was telling the truth, because he said some very nice things about me. He said these things to a raft of curious people who came in to look me over.

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My, my, my! Never in my life have I seen such cheeky and familiar humans. They would drop in and talk and talk and talk. They walked around me and smeared my polish with their vulgar fingers. They would lift up my hood and poke into the most personal of my workings, and ask fool questions till I wanted to die of shame. They criticized and appraised me. They discussed my points with a brazen insolence that would lead you to suppose I was some soulless animal designed for their pleasure and delight alone. It was perfectly disgusting!

Then SHE came. I don't

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mean *the* she. I mean *a* she. A dragon! A flabby-necked hippopotamus! And for three mortal hours I lived in the horrid dread that she would buy me. She weighed two hundred and eighty pounds. She was warm and perspirationy, and she smelt of sandal-wood. She heaved herself into my tonneau and mashed me all down on one side till my beautiful new springs ached. She sat all over me, that woman did. She examined my cushions minutely, and killed a moth under the carpet on my floor. Just couldn't keep her hands off. That was *my* moth, anyway.

I hated that woman! I loathed her! And I made up my mind,

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then and there, that if she did buy me, I would stall myself in the middle of the first railroad crossing and be spilled all over the map.

Talk about a romance! Well, if this wasn't the reverse of it, then I didn't know the difference between my driving shaft and a pneumatic pump.

With the woman was a male human, a warty little beast, with a nasal whine and an air of abject apology. I thought he was her slave; that she owned him soul and body, just as she intended owning me. Later she referred to him as her husband, and when *she* stopped pecking at me, *he* began. I despised the

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little gink. At the same time I wanted to hug him. He saved my life.


He did this by offering to purchase me for fifty dollars less than my list price, and my salesman got hot in his differential and lost a customer.

When the hippo and the wart had gone, I tried to reach out and pat my salesman's head with my right mud guard, but remembered in time and saved my dignity. Gosh! I could smell that sandal-wood for a week. It got into my cushions.

Romance! *Hell!*

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CHAPTER V

 FEW days later Billy came in. I call him Billy, not in undue familiarity, but because I afterwards knew him so well, it got to be a sort of habit.

Billy was a fine, clean young fellow, with nice eyes and hair that blew all over his forehead. I liked Billy. I liked him immensely; but without doubt he knew less concerning machinery than any other sixteen idiots I have ever bumped against on the road of life. Hanged if he knew a spark-plug from a cotter pin.

But what I liked about him,

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he *acknowledged* his inexperience. He had learned to drive the car of a friend, he said, but had never been introduced to a choo-choo's works. My salesman asked him what he would do if anything happened on the road. Billy laughed and said he would just sit tight till some angel came along with a monkey wrench and a basket full of sandwiches.

This didn't sound particularly promising, so I hoped he wouldn't buy me; but Billy wasn't certain. He acknowledged, with a blush, that he was to be married the following week, and wanted me to help him out on his bridal trip.

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Shades of the altar! I scented a romance instantly, and began to notice Billy's points; for I tell you an auto can't be too particular in the selection of an owner. There are just as many makes of owners as there are of cars; but I'm sorry to say they don't run quite as uniformly as *we* do. Many of them are merely piles of junk.

Billy admired me for a while, but said he couldn't decide definitely until the lady looked me over. I didn't think much of this, either; yet, having little to say in the matter, I could only sit in that sales room and grow hot and cold with alternate hopes and fears. I *wanted* to

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go on a honeymoon,—who wouldn't?—yet I wasn't so keen about having that particular brand of bridegroom at my steering wheel. It didn't spell Safety First.

An hour or so later, just as I had fallen into a peaceful doze, Billy came back again, and brought HER with him. Wow! I woke up with a jump, just as though a dog had nipped at my right rear wheel without barking.

She was medium-sized and shaped like a classy little runabout. She had dark hair, with a saucy toque hat on one side of it, and a feather that pointed at someone else's eye. *Her* eyes



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were slashers! They were big and soft and glorious! I can compare them only with a compound electric self-starter. Her name was Ruth, and the minute I lamped the lady——

Pray pardon the seeming vulgarity. I say *seeming*, because, while the expression "to lamp" a person may be slangy and incorrect for human use, in an automobile it is eminently proper.

Where was I? Oh, yes! The minute I lamped the lady I was in for life.

She came right up to me, placed one little hand on my radiator cap, looked at me, with her head on one side—and

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smiled. Say, boys! Ever been there? *Geel!*

This was enough; but when her little patent-leathered foot and its silk-clad ankle went over my running board and she plumped herself down into my cushioned arms — well — she could pack her clothes in *my* tonneau and *keep* them there till the cows came home!

“Really, Billy, I entertain a high regard for your selective gearing!”

And now I was in a blue funk. I was just as afraid that Ruth and Billy *wouldn't* buy me as I had been afraid that the hippo *would*. Then the lady began to ask questions. I draw a veil

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over most of them, for her knowledge of my internal mechanism was about on a par with Billy's, only hers was a trifle more feminine and disconcerting. If she had to start me by herself, hanged if she wouldn't try to do it by twisting my tail light. And yet, if *she* wanted me to start that way, by Jupiter, I *might!*

Finally she asked if I were the very BEST car on the market. My salesman said no, I wasn't. There were many other cars of better material and finer finish; but, for the money, I was a machine that would "stand up" under rough usage and run with the very best. "Besides," he

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added, "you might find it economical to *learn* with an *inexpensive* car."

Ruth was disappointed. So was I; but Billy looked at it differently. "My dear," he whispered to the pouting little lady, "this is the first salesman I have met who has told me the truth, straight from the shoulder; therefore all the *good* things he says about it must be true. It will be half yours, you know, and if *you* like this one, I'll buy it—on the spot."

Ruth smiled and nodded; then just as I was about to whoop from pure delight, the whoop was cut short by a complication. Billy wanted to take me out im-



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mediately; but what do you think that nasty little salesman said? That I was a *SAMPLE* car! He could get another, exactly like me, in about two weeks. Well, what do you think of that! *Another* car! Exactly *like* me! To go on *my* honeymoon! Well, by Gosh! If there hadn't been a lady present I'd have given that little snip his proper pedigree.

Then Billy took a hand. He said he wouldn't postpone his wedding, no, not for all the cars on earth. Be darned if he would! He'd take me now—cash down—or not at all.

Good old Billy! He didn't know machinery, but he knew

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his mind. I liked that boy right off the little silver reel.

The snip of a salesman said he would speak to the general manager, and I felt instinctively that my goose was cooked. That manager had office rules, and would just as soon think of breaking them as I would think of breaking my drivingshaft. Oh, gee, it was over! I wouldn't be married, after all! I was going to be bumped, dog-gone it! Bumped!

Then Ruth stepped up to the plate and dusted the handle of her diplomatic bat.

"No," she said, "*I'll* speak to the general manager." And she went upstairs to do it.

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Say! It was all right now! I knew it! When Ruth went after anything, she got it. I learned that later on. As for the general manager, if he felt about her as *I* did, he would not only break every rule in the office and the factory, but would beg her to *let* him do it, as a favor.

Billy waited. While doing so, he sat on my back and jiggled with my switch. In about five minutes the lady reappeared. She was flushed and excited, but smiling. From the balcony she waved her hand and called to Billy:

"It's all right, child of mine," she laughed. "Hurrah! *He's ours!*"




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Yes, it was really true! I was Billy's! I was Ruth's! I was going on a honeymoon. I wanted to laugh! To howl! If it hadn't been for my brand-new owner sitting on my brand-new back, by Jupiter, I would have bucked—bucked in pure and unadulterated romantic joy.

Gosh ding it! *Wow!*

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CHAPTER VI

OR the next few days Billy had an instructor and was taught to run me. Oh, say! I'd rather not discuss it, if you don't mind. It was too harrowing.

At any rate, on the fourth day he was provided with a license and was permitted, *by law*, to be turned loose on an innocent public, with a forty-horse-power engine of destruction, and without an examination of his eyes or brains.

Dear heart, it was a shame! I remarked previously that Billy had nice eyes. My opinion of

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his brains had not improved a particle.

I hoped, with all my gasolinic soul, that the fairies would look after him till the cops got him. Hurrah for the fairies! They saved the precious lives of nine infants on that first sad morning.

When I got back to the garage they had to rub me down. It wasn't merely moisture on my body, it was sweat; and believe me, little one, that sweat was *red!*

Heigh-ho! but what is trouble, after all, as compared with the joy of anticipation? We were going to be married! At least Billy and Ruth were, and I flat-

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tered myself that this was one of the times when three was company and not a crowd. Yes, even on a honeymoon!

The day arrived at last! By George, it was a day to swear by; and when I rolled out of that garage, without a speck of dust on my glistening coat, hanged if I didn't give the laugh to a lilac-cushioned limousine that tried to pass me.

A garage employee took me round to her father's house on Madison Avenue and stopped me at the curb. I wanted to go in, of course; but when a human, even a cheap employee, slaps his foot against your switch and kills your gas, you stay where

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you are put and you keep *on* staying there.

There were oodles of humans at our wedding, but I had the place of honor at the open door. After a while two side-whiskered grave diggers came out and put the luggage into me. There was one brand-new trunk, four brand-new suit cases, three satchels, overcoats and lap robes, two leather "varzes" filled with golf clubs, a pair of tennis racquets and a camera and some flowers.

"See here, my merry-minded flunks, what in blazes do you think I *am*? A moving van?"

The smileless ones departed solemnly, without reply, leaving me rather grumpy, until I real-

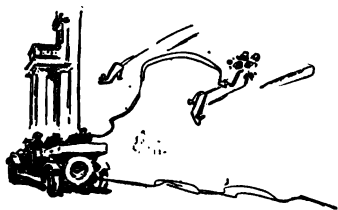
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ized that the weight in my tonneau would help me to run more steadily—for Ruth. So I smiled again and waited.

It was over in half an hour; but just before it ended, a man came out and started me. He speeded me up a trifle, then muffled me down and left me purring peacefully, a thing of speed and power, alive and ready for its future destiny.

Suddenly it happened. I heard a joyful shout; then Ruth and Billy came running down the steps and jumped into my two front seats, followed by laughter and a shower of rattling rice.

One bow - legged, pop - eyed



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idiot threw a shoe and dented my nice new mud guard. Dog-gone his skin! Suppose he had hit my girl! Why is it that there must always be just one black blotch on the snowy bosom of—click!—whir-r-r!—zing!—and we were off, followed by happy, happy wishes and another clattering shower of rice!

Billy swung out of Madison Avenue and threw me into high. He nearly got a newsboy; but this was pardonable so directly following the ceremony. He lifted one arm to wipe a moist forehead with his sleeve, and aimed me at a church. This may have happened because he had a home wedding; but, please,

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please, *both* hands, my son. You'll need them.

He used both hands, and we wobbled through Forty-fourth Street, headed straight for Broadway. We should have turned up Fifth Avenue, but that was Billy's fault, not mine. Remember, dear, that young Lochinvar was at the wheel.

We got into Broadway. Yes, I knew we would, and the roar of traffic surged around us dizzily. Ah! Better than I thought! There was a clear space ahead, and Billy went for it while the fruit was ripe. A six-foot human at the crossing raised his hand, but Billy didn't notice him. I did!

"B-R-R-R-R-R!"

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No, it wasn't my electric horn that handed out that roar. It was the cop. You bet it was, and he came straight for us, with blood in his Irish eye. Billy just had sense enough to jam on the brake and throw me into neutral; otherwise I would have stalled in very shame.

Pinched! Oh, Lord! And on my wedding day! Why, *why*, did I ever leave that peaceful little village of Detroit!

Billy spluttered and apologized, but it did no good. His copship got out his book and took my number. Then Ruth chipped in and raised the ante. She showed that cop two rows of perfect teeth and turned her

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compound electric starters on him; but the Irish ruffian refused point-blank to start. Just here a strange thing happened. He glanced from our brand new baggage to the rice in our darling's hat. His frown departed, and in its place came a slow, broad, kindly grin.

"G'wan!" he ordered, with a wave of his big, majestic hand, "I guess ye'll be after makin' more throuble f'r yeselves than me an' th' cour-r-t cud give ye. G'wan!"

Saved! By a grain of rice! But don't you plume yourselves, you precious pair of trouble-loving doves; you are going to have some closer calls than this!

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It was better for a time, till we got to Columbus Circle, where Billy nearly tore my shoes off when he heard a whistle blow. The whistle was for him to cross, but he wasn't taking any chances. That boy was acquiring brains, and, unless I landed in the scrap heap first, he might actually learn to drive me.

On upper Broadway we passed two funerals and one political parade, going our way, of course, and the going wasn't easy. The whole of New York's populace seemed to stroll out singly and collectively to cross our path.

"G-r-r-r-r!" would grunt my electric horn. "Get out of my

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way, you swine!" They wouldn't! "Bah!" would say the populace, "Just murder us if you dare, and pay the Insurance Company several times our value. Come on! We like it!"

And children? Gee! They seemed literally *bent* on suicide, they and their go-carts, not to mention dogs. Being of an accommodating nature, and partially helped by Billy's nervousness, there were times when it seemed that a child or two was almost mine. But no! I was disappointed!

A loaded beer truck came staggering out of One Hundred and First Street, and took a streak of paint from my right

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rear fender. The drunken beast! A dear old lady darted around a street car and tried to cross. She heard my electric horn and darted back. She saw the street car and turned again, repeated the manoeuvre several times, in the manner of a bewildered Dago laborer or a hen; then fell down flat between my two front paws.

She was helped up and told to go home; but positively refused to do so till she told *us* what she thought of us. She did it well for an old lady, so we thanked her politely and started out again on our joyous wedding tour.

At 110th Street Billy stopped me beside the curb. His collar



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was wilted down to nowhere, and his undershirt declined to hold another drop of moisture.


"Why are we stopping, dear?"

The bridegroom did not answer her immediately. He took off his leather gloves, deliberately. He took out his handkerchief and mopped his hot, wet face.

"Darling," he whispered into her shell-like ear, "I know it's our wedding day, but I've got to have a drink. I *need* it!"

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CHAPTER VII

HEN Billy came out he looked better. He probably felt as I do when a quart or two of cool liquid is poured into my radiator after an exciting piece of work. He started me up and off we went again, this time smoothly and without a hitch. It was probably due to that lordly stimulant.

We conquered Yonkers nicely, with a balk or so at the crowded square and a couple of blisters on my brake bands. We turned to the left, then right, and all three of us heaved a sigh of

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peace as we struck the smooth, broad avenue.

An unobstructed road at last! The bliss of a honeymoon had now begun, and a new, young world was open, macadamized, and ready for us to roll upon it, happily.

We were sneaking along at twenty miles an hour, contented, fearless, and without an earthly care; and so I began to dream. By George, I guess I was just about the luckiest little car from Maine to Texas! Sold—within a week—and sold to *her!* To Ruth! The finest piece of un-mechanical femininity that ever sat on a fellow's back! Ah! That was the point! On *me!*

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*I was the one to carry her! Yes, I! Billy was there, of course; but Billy was just a passenger. I was the chap to engineer that honeymoon, and to see that the moon was bright and the honey sweet! And dang my compression if I wouldn't see her through! I'd make my cushions soft and snug—for HER! I'd ease my springs, in their every fine steel leaf—for HER! I'd avoid the bumpy places, and run with an easy, noiseless tread—for HER! And then, in the evening, when the run was done—*Wow!* It happened!*

I had almost plunged into an open culvert, and nearly fractured my steering gear in getting



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back to earth again. And then I realized it! All in one horrible, hideous, self - accusing punch. My God! *I was in love! With another fellow's wife!*

And yet I retained one softening dab of consolation. It was wrong of me to be in love with Ruth, of course; but how about that culvert? Don't you forget, dear heart, that the groom, not I, was at the steering wheel!

"Say, Billy, old chap! You were dreaming the same dreams *I* was, weren't you? Well, you wake up, my son, and keep your eyes on the road!"

That's what *I* did, anyway. It pays. There is some rather striking scenery along the Hud-

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son; but I didn't notice it. The Cop of Carelessness had given me a warning.

After this we got on swimmingly, till we passed through Peekskill, and here we crossed a trolley track. This latter incident, in itself, may strike you as being trivial. It wasn't.

The crossing referred to was a rough one. The rails stood up four inches above their bed, and Billy made me take it at twenty-five miles an hour. My front wheels hit the rail, and jumped. This wasn't so bad because they were running free. But with my back wheels it was different. They struck with weight and power on top of them, and my springs

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rebelled. Up went my whole rear end. My engine, for an instant, raced; then I landed with a shock that jarred me to the teeth—and did it all over again on the second rail.

“Say, Billy! *Don't* do that! You mortify me! For the Lord's sake, boy, display a little mercy and intelligence! Either slow down and take a crossing easily, or throw out my clutch to disconnect my engine! Yes, you idiot, and take your foot off my accelerator while you're doing it!”

“The idea of jouncing me like that! I'm not a pile-driver! I'm a *car*! If you don't believe it, look at the luggage in my

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tonneau! Look at your wife's smashed hat and its crippled feather! Aha! And look at the way she's *looking* at it! Call that a honeymoon expression? Well, I *don't*! It's a hard, cold, silent criticism of a vacuum-headed jackass! Now then! We'll start all over again. No hard feelings, though. Come on!"

We went. I tried to banish the incident from my system, but I couldn't; it was too much to expect. Shortly after this we passed a cemetery, and I took my eyes off the road long enough to speculate as to how soon all three of us would repose in some such peaceful spot; then, presently,

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I lost my grouch in the joy of running.

We had gone perhaps ten miles, when, without a warning, I felt a short, sharp stab in my right hind foot. I didn't know the meaning of it at the moment. It was my first experience; but when I heard the hiss of slowly escaping air, I *knew!*

But do you think those doves paid the least attention to that sound? Not they! They sat on my back and serenely billed and cooed, while I, the most important part of their bridal trip, was limping along on a flat tire. Yet, presently, the bridegroom spake, and his mouth was the mouth of wisdom:

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"I wonder why the choo-choo keeps bearing to the right. I actually have to *hold* it in the road. Oh, well, in the morning I'll take a look."

There you are! He'd look at me in the morning! Oh, you chuckle-headed imbecile! Don't you know I'm trying to *tell* you that there's something wrong, and you ought to correct *now*! What's that? Then *don't*! It's nothing to *me*, you know. *I'm* merely chewing up the fabric of a forty-dollar tire. I *like* it! I'm rather destructive in my tendencies; but don't you forget, old sport, that forty dollars would almost buy our Ruth another hat—in

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place of the one you telescoped at the railroad crossing.

Ha! Mental telepathy! I actually *forced* a ray or two of it upon Ruth. At least, the moment *my* mind induced *her* mind to dwell upon a new hat, she came to my rescue like a medium and a lady.

"Darling," she murmured to the accomplished mechanic at her side, "haven't you noticed a sort of—er—bumpity-bumpy feeling in our car?"

He *ought* to have noticed it. That bumpity - bumpy feeling was caused by my valve-shield hitting the gravel each time my wheel turned over. Anyone

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other than a love - demented moon-calf would certainly have——

"Why, yes," cooed Billy. "I've been *wondering* what it was for the last three miles."

He drove on happily, and held me in the road.

"Darling," commanded Ruth, "I really *think* you ought to get out and see about it."

The lord of our house obeyed. He climbed down and came behind me, stood thoughtfully for a moment till he noticed my poor, flat shoe; then a great intelligence descended upon him, in one glorious, Heaven-lit flood.

"By Jove!" declared the

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bridegroom. "If we haven't got a puncture!"


"My goodness!" squealed the blushing bride. "Whatever shall we do?"

"Fix it," returned our stalwart child of wisdom, as he shed his coat. "According to printed instructions, it ought to take me just four minutes."

It did. Four minutes to the dot—plus two hours and seventeen other minutes.

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CHAPTER VIII

AY, boys! Did you ever see a novice change a shoe? Well, take it from me, it's worth the price of two front-row seats, secured from a speculator. It isn't a comedy, though. It's tragedy.

The scene is, usually, as follows: A dusty, hot and lonely road; a disabled auto, and a pair of youthful innocents made up for the parts.

Discovered; our hero, rolling up his sleeves, his manly muscles displayed to our admiring view.

Discovered; our heroine, cool and sweet and perfectly serene,

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seated gracefully on a soft cushion, and fully prepared to offer expert mechanical advice without the slightest provocation.

And so the play begins. The jack, the tools, and other important "properties" in the tragedy are under the car's rear seat. The rear seat is under a mountain pile of luggage. *Why* this is, God knows; yet the rule seems fixed with ninety per cent of tourists.

Pray pardon the digression. Billy portered out the luggage and placed it carefully on the edge of a ditch behind him. Then he jacked me up, after the manner of a master-mechanic—on a spree. This ended the first act.

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The hero wiped his manly forehead with the back of a greasy hand, got out the tool kit and unrolled it. I saw it, out of the corner of my side lamp, and felt like the fellow in the dentist's chair, hopeful, but a little fearful. There were certain roots I wanted to retain, yet, even in Billy's competent hands, I was just a little nervous.

He unbolted my demountable rim and removed the valve cap, according to instructions; then he placed both hands on the top of my tire, braced himself, and heaved—but *not* according to instructions. He reaped results.

The removal of that rim required one child power, instead

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of a hero and a half power. Our particular hero—and the tire—went backward into the ditch already mentioned, carrying two suit cases and a golf bag with him. Our heroine screamed delightfully.

Billy fished up the suit cases, poured a gallon of dirty water out of the golf bag, squeezed some more of it from the back of himself—and smiled. Yes, he did! He smiled!

“By George,” he observed, “I didn’t think the thing could come off quite so easily!”

Thus ended the second act. The third was more dramatic, but it *ran* too long. The plot was this: We were carrying one



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extra tire, mounted on its rim, pumped up and ready for emergency; but no plot is worth a hang without a complication, and, as usual, the hero made it. Billy had *forethought* (wonderful little word) and he used it then and there.

"Suppose," he argued, "we had *another* puncture without another tire. *Then* where would we be, I ask you? Where? No, sir-ee, you don't catch *me* up any such tree, by gee! I'm going to change that inner tube!"

He started out to do it. The process—according to printed instructions—was absurdly simple. The authors of that inspired pamphlet direct, as fol-

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lows: "Remove plate A from inner rim directly across break B. Insert tire iron between rim and shoe, C, D, and pry latter loose. Twist rim sharply, and the tire drops off."

The LIARS! I don't want to knock the automobile business; but I'll bet myself against a push cart that those high-browed, science-reeking authors worked out their tire-removing theory with a piece of bent tin and a doughnut.

Billy didn't know this, so he went to work—whistling. He secured the services of a tire iron, a cold chisel and a large hammer; then paused to consult the pamphlet. He removed plate

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A from directly across break B. He inserted the edge of the tire iron between rim and shoe, C, D, struck at the top of tire iron, E, with hammer, F, missed it and smashed his finger. *Gee!*

This last part wasn't in the book, but Billy did it perfectly. He sucked his finger, laid the book aside forever, and went to work again. He fought with that shoe, like a warrior and a gentleman, but he couldn't budge it. He turned it over and attacked it on the other side, using the tire iron in one hand and the cold chisel in the other; yet points C, D, declined positively to be pried apart.

Then Billy stood up, took the



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tire between his legs, reached underneath and strove to disembowel it. By this time he was mad clean through. His hair was wet, and it hung down in his eyes.

"Darling," suggested Ruth, "why don't you try that little screw driver?"

Billy cursed soulfully in an undertone, but made no audible reply.

"*Darling!*" repeated Ruth, with a slightly wounded air, "*I said*—why don't you try the screw driver?"

Billy seized the weapon and jabbed it viciously in the general direction of C, D, twisted it and broke it off at the handle.

"There you are," he observed

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sweetly. "It's a wonder we hadn't thought of it before."

The heroine pouted divinely, turned her back on the hero, and regarded the landscape with a far-off, bored expression. The hero went to work.

Personally I hadn't had any afternoon nap, so I closed my lamps and took it. Fifty minutes later, when I woke up, that tire had not dropped off.

"Precious," suggested Ruth, "perhaps if you'd oil it thoroughly——"

But Billy interrupted. He rose up from the ground, butted his head on my mud guard, and looked the wife of his bosom in the eye.

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"Dear child," he purred, but with a germ of murder in the tone, "will you kindly oblige me and take a walk?"

The dear child did it. She flounced out of my front seat, annihilated Billy with her electric starters, then went away with her back up, leaving me blinking sadly after her.

Poor Billy was lonely, too. Maybe that was the dagger point which goaded him. At any rate, he flew at his work like a demon and literally tore that rim and shoe apart. I don't know *how* he did it. I was looking up the road—at Ruth.

He removed the punctured tube and stuffed a new one in.

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He hadn't noticed that the fabric of my shoe was cracked wide open from a three-mile run upon it, nor that the outside rubber directly opposite the crack was chafed and bruised. Why *should* he notice it? His mind was *above* such trifles.

Then Ruth came back, repentantly, and kissed him. It *looked* like repentance; but she may have returned because she had one last suggestion, and couldn't hold it.

"Sweetheart," she murmured, "you look so hot and tired. Hadn't we better put those horrid things inside the car and use the wheel that's ready?"

Now this was sense; just com-

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mon, every-day, good horse-sense; but the hero wouldn't have it.

"My dear," he answered, and his jaw looked square and fine, "*I'm going to fix this tire—if it takes till the end of my honeymoon!*"

By Jupiter, that boy had grit! But Ruth was a female and couldn't appreciate it. She climbed on my back, huddled herself in a corner of my seat and began crying softly, unconsciously dabbing at her eyes with a piece of oily waste.

Billy put the shoe on the rim. He must have done it accidentally. Otherwise it couldn't have been done. Then he pumped it

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up with a foot pump till I thought the poor boy would burst. Meanwhile Ruth said nothing. Billy sat down on my running board and rested for a minute, then tottered to his feet and bolted the rim in place. He skinned his knuckles, but he didn't even swear. In silence he let me down and put away the jack and other tools. In silence he stored the luggage in my tonneau, and climbed into the driver's seat.

Then he apologized, like a fine, brave man, and kissed her.

"Well, anyway," smiled Ruth looking tenderly into his moist and grime-smear'd countenance, "when we get to Albany, they'll

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never take us for a bride and groom."

"Huh!" said the hero, and threw me into high.

We covered two more miles, then—*bang!* No, it wasn't a back-fire. I had blown out that criminally neglected shoe.

When Ruth was made to understand the nature of the trouble, she started in to tell her brand-new husband that if *he* had only followed *her* advice in the *first* instance—. But she checked herself in time. If she hadn't, her brand-new husband would have driven her straight to a divorce court, on a flat tire.

He got out, jacked me up again, and unbolted the afflicted

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shoe. He threw it into the tonneau, and bolted on the other one. He let me down, replaced the jack and luggage, and we took up the march again. We didn't march far, however. We were all too tired. We stopped at the first road-house we came to. It didn't look like much, but it smelled of rest.

Billy got out and made arrangements. Then Ruth got out and disappeared, leaving me blinking sadly after her. Billy and the clerk took out the luggage. Then Billy got wearily on my back again and drove me around to the stable yard. Here he came upon a big, vacant-eyed Hungarian in charge.



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"Say," said Billy, pointing at me with a black and oily thumb, "just roll this somewhere, will you? *Anywhere!* I'm hungry—and I'm too damn tired to eat!"

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CHAPTER IX



SPENT the night in the stable. I didn't sleep much. I couldn't. I detest the smell of horses!

There was one right next to me, a knock-kneed, flea-bitten old devil, who devoured oats and hay and other truck the whole night long. I could hear him crunching every minute. He wasn't a horse. He was a hog!

I asked him to have a drink of gasoline, in the hope that he would die; but he said: "No, thank you, sir. I'd like to, awfully; but I pull the temperance wagon, and the boss might smell

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my breath and kick me in the slats."

No, he *wasn't* a hog. He was a fool! What do you think he did? Woke me up out of a sound sleep at three o'clock to tell me he had thought of a joke. Said he was a *self-starter*. Then he whinnied for fifteen minutes, in blatant, asinine delight.

I didn't even curse him. What was the use? There's a kind of humor in this world that profanity has no effect upon.

About five he waked me up again, lashed at a couple of flies with his mangy tail, and called my attention to his "electric switch."

Say! What are you going to



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do with a fellow like that? If *he's* the kind of acquaintance one has to meet on one's honeymoon, hanged if I'm not sorry I didn't remain a bachelor.

Presently he started on another joke.

"Oh, *dry up!*" I told him.

"I *did*," he retorted, "when I joined the temperance union." Then he laughed again, till his coarse amusement shook his smelly stable and alarmed the rats.

I looked about me for something to throw at him, but thought better of it. I knew if I did throw it, he would giggle and make a pun about it; so I gritted the teeth of every cog

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wheel inside of me, and held my peace. But never mind. Some day I hope to catch him on the road.

In the morning Billy came out and looked at me. He had on his duster and his gloves, which gave me the hope of parting company with that humor-poisoned horse; but Billy disappointed me. He regarded me sheepishly, came toward me sidewise, got as far as my running board, stalled, and went back into the roadhouse.

I know now what was the matter with him. Nerves! A beginner is far more nervous *before* he starts than at any other time. A hideous fear comes over

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him that he is going to back into something and wound the insurance company, or commit foul murder in the broad of day when he shifts his gears.

"But don't you worry, son. You'll soon get over it, when you learn to shift without looking at the lever, and begin to think with your feet."

In half an hour he came out again, this time with his jaw squared, and we backed out slowly and without calamity. I was in a nasty, ugly humor; but, still it was something to be rid of that horse. He called after me to ask if I knew the difference between a horse's bridle, a bridal trip, and a direct drive;

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but I never heard the answer. I turned sharply and bolted for the road.

We ran around to the front and stopped at the block after only three attempts. Billy and the clerk put in the baggage. Billy gave the clerk a half a dollar. The clerk accepted it and displayed his gratitude by spitting on my mud guard. I guess he must have been the owner of the horse.

Then Ruth came out. Ah! It was different now! Quite different! The world lit up, just as though you had turned on an electric switch. No, I don't mean a horse's tail. I mean what I say—a *switch*!

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It was funny about that girl. She had me going; and what is more, she *kept* me going. I experienced a positive feeling of auto-intoxication every time she evensat on me. Oh! Excuse me. I must have caught the tendency out there in that smelly stable.

Well, we started. We had intended yesterday to make Albany our first stop. We had come forty-eight miles and two-tenths. Albany is a hundred and fifty. But never mind; we'd make it up today.

The above were Billy's ruminations, not mine. Personally I thought we were lucky to have gotten past Forty-fifth Street.

We lunched at Wappingers

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Falls. Say, boys! Now isn't that a name to curse a village with? It will never be a town. It can't. The title is discouraging to artistic building and to social progress.

Anyway, we lunched at Wappingers Falls and spent a restless night in Poughkeepsie. In the morning Billy blew me to a pair of shoes and an automatic pump. I think he bought the pump for himself; but I don't want to seem ungrateful.

We were all right now, and ready to face what happy Fortune flung. Billy did the flinging. Fortune was out of business and hadn't said where she moved.

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The day was superb. I mean from a weather point of view. For me it held naught save chunks and chunks of clammy, oppressive gloom. Our hero started in, right off the bat, to take the conceit out of me. You know, I never did think much of Billy, either as a mechanic or a bridegroom; but as the champion vanity-smasher of all the world, I reward him with the buttered muffin.

The first thing he did was to stop me on a long, steep hill. Then he couldn't start again. When he released my brake I began to roll backward. Why not? You don't expect me to go forward and backward at the

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same time, do you? Billy jammed on the emergency, sat still and tried to work it out. Our Ruth was there with a few suggestions. You know, it wasn't a habit with her. It was a trait; and I've since observed that it's as much a part of a woman as her powder rag. Sometimes they lose the rag; but they keep the trait.

What the hero *should* have done was simple. Throw me into first. Apply my power gradually, and gradually release the emergency. All I wanted was to catch my balance, and I'd take that hill without a jerk; but Billy wouldn't think of anything so intricate. What *he*

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ought to do is to drive a temperance wagon—and that horse.

Ruth suggested that we back down very slowly to the bottom of the hill, get on level ground and then start up again; but Billy rejected the scheme for one of his own and a better one. He turned me almost crosswise, backed me into a tree and put my eye out. I liked that eye. I needed it for rear-end casualties; but that wasn't Billy's business just at present. He smiled in triumph, when the tree trunk held me firmly, and I growled up the hill on first.

I forgot to say I had been running on my dry cell batteries ever since we left Poughkeepsie;

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but look here! I'm too disgusted to go on with this chapter. If you don't mind, I'll continue the history of my degradation in the next chapter. Thank you. You, at least, have some consideration for a self-respecting auto. Brides and grooms are apt to be rather flighty. I suppose it's a sort of trait.

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CHAPTER X

DID you ever hear of a man committing two separate and distinct crimes on his wedding trip?

Well, Billy did, and both were done to me. Of course there were more than two. He broke every commandment in an auto's ritual of "Don'ts"; but at present I refer to these especial two.

We had spent the night in Albany. In the morning my generous owner bought me eleven gallons of gasoline, but no oil.

We started. I didn't *want* to start. In fact, I tried *not* to start; but when I felt that elec-

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tric juice shoot into me—well, I simply had to.

We got out of town and struck a broad, smooth asphalt road. Billy and Ruth were happy. I wasn't. True, I had *some* oil, but there were air bubbles in it, and I didn't like the feeling. It made me nervous and a little warm. We covered fifteen miles and then I began to itch and burn, as though I had invited a million fleas inside of me, for lunch. My oil pump was pumping air, and I missed my splash.

The bride and groom? Why, bless you, they were there all right, perched on my back and having the time of their sweet young lives. I tell you, it made

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me hot! They were laughing! Singing! Oh, it wasn't fair! It wasn't! *They* had everything—in the whole wide world—to make them happy. And here was I! Half crazy! Feverish and hot! Pleading with them! Crying to them, as near as an auto can, for just a little pity—and a quart of oil!

Of course I don't blame the girl. I can't! I love her! But oh, you *William*! If it wasn't for Ruth, I'd dump you into the nearest ditch and jump on top of you!

Say! What do you think the blatherskite was doing? Driving! With one hand! And the other arm around our wife!

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He was perfectly happy, William was, and happiness breeds pace. He hit me up to a thirty-mile clip and hugged his soul-mate till her corset cracked!

"Oh, Billy, Billy, please!" I tried to call. "I'm doing my very best, indeed I am; but for *your* sake, and for *mine*, stop thinking of the girl for just five minutes, *and give me oil!*"

He didn't! We went on for five more miles, and stopped. Now maybe you think this was the end of my troubles. It wasn't. It was the black fore-runner of the second crime.

We stopped at a crossroad to ask directions of a native. There was a big sign post in full view,



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with an arrow pointing straight ahead; but Billy didn't notice it. The native told us to use our eyes and follow our fool noses. We thanked him courteously and did it. That's where the crime developed from a bud into a blossom, and gave me a distaste for flowers.

In stopping, Billy muffled me down to save my gas. This was considerate. In starting, he forgot to advance my spark. This *wasn't* considerate. It was—— Say! I did put down what I thought of Billy; but the publisher wouldn't print it. He probably doesn't own an auto, and therefore failed to appreciate the value of my hot remarks.

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Of course I got hot. Who wouldn't, with a retarded spark and no oil? I heated up till I thought I had reached my limit, and then got hotter still. I was mad all over! Boiling mad! That's right. I won't evade it. I confess it freely, without regret or shame. I *boiled!* I wanted to burst in rage; and if it hadn't been for one little air vent I would have blown my radiator cap right up into the lap of one of my angelic ancestors.

It was Ruth who came to my assistance, bless her heart! even though she didn't know it.

"Goodness!" she observed to the mountain of intelligence beside her. "Don't you think it

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just a trifle *warm* for June?"

If she had asked *me*, I could have told her it was a trifle warm for hell; but she didn't ask me.

No, Billy hadn't noticed it. He reminded me of someone I had met before. Oh, yes. Remember that horse, back yonder, just the other side of Wappingers Falls? Well—never mind. It doesn't matter. We went on for two miles more. Some kind-hearted fairy poked at Ruth, and she tried again.

"Dearest," she said, "I hate to disturb you, but would you mind stopping and get my fan?"

I'm glad she didn't ask for mine. It was the only thing that kept me from blowing up.

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We stopped, and they saw my steam. Even Billy noticed it. It was coming out in clouds, from under me, both ends and at the sides. It's a wonder, though, he didn't think it emanated from the roadbed. He got out quickly, and, for once, seemed almost anxious.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "Will you look what the little choo-choo's up to!"

"Good gracious!" echoed Ruth, in a tone as near as possible to a wise suggestion. "Perhaps the poor thing wants a drink of water."

Billy agreed with her, and got the water in his hat from a ditch beside the road. He asked the

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light of his life to hold it for a minute, took out his handkerchief and removed my radiator cap.

Ah! Glory of glories! That's where I got even. Know what I did? I spit on him! Two quarts of boiling water on his hands and face. And it took the skin off.

What's that? No, I'm not ashamed. If he hadn't dodged I'd have spit in his hair and down his idiotic back. He got what was coming to him for neglecting *me*, and he got it good and hot!

Then Ruth got even with yours truly. That's always the way with a woman when you



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correct a loved one, even though you do it for the good of his untrained soul. She cried and kissed his sore spots. She did it over and over till I almost swooned with jealousy; but still I wasn't sorry. She could cry all she wanted to. I didn't give a whing-whang if she howled.

With some owners, you've got to run over them to teach them anything. As for Billy, I merely burned him; and when he finds out *why* I did it, he will never forget my oil and spark again.

"So kiss him, dear heart! That scalding hurts him like the devil, and he needs the gentle ministration of thy tears."

I *was* a little sorry, though, for

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Ruth. Our wife spilled a hat
full of ditch water all over her-
self, poor child.

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CHAPTER XI

BY the first streak of good luck that had come my way in four whole days, there was a cheap garage not more than a hundred yards down the road. We made for it slowly, on low gear, Billy driving, Ruth petting his poor arm, and I spitting hot water on my hood and windshield.

The garage man came out and looked us over. He found out what the trouble was, and looked at Billy, though he didn't speak his thoughts aloud. He filled my oil case to the brim. It sizzled, but I wanted to kiss him. He

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noted the position of my spark lever, and made a remark in general about people who drove in that particular scientific manner. Our hero bit his burned lip and deigned no "arnswer."

We rested for an hour, till I cooled down. Meanwhile my happy owner anointed his smarting wounds with oil. I was glad of this. It would help him to remember. We rewarded the garage man, and once more were about to start.

"How long have you had it?" asked the man.

"A week," said Billy.

"How long do you *expect* to have it?" asked the man.

"Dunno," said Billy.

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"Thought so," observed the man, in an undertone, and disappeared into his cheap garage.

We went away.

We were now in a funny country. There were lots and lots and lots of roads, but they all seemed to lead to Troy. No matter whether we were on a State road, a cross road or a detour, the sign posts *insisted* that we go to Troy. We didn't *want* to go to Troy. We swore we wouldn't *go* to Troy; but it made no difference. It was Ruth who circumvented the sign posts by a really bright suggestion.

"Darling," she said (to Billy, not to me), "why don't we go on

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a road where there aren't any signs at all?"

We did. The plan was brilliant and to the point, but it had its disadvantages. We got lost, and stayed so for a long, long time. We didn't like being lost, so we tried to find ourselves. We even tried the Blue Book, until Ruth sighed and put it away in a golf bag. Then we began to ask questions of the natives. The natives, to a unit, were totally devoid of any bumps of geographical aptitude.

At last we met a genius. He was a moth-eaten old codger who had lived there for years and years, and was proud of it. He told us all about it. Then



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he told us how to go. His directions were simple, clear, succinct.

"Yer kin take ther *back* rud fer a piece, till yer come to ther State Rud; an' then yer'll hev a fine, *new* rud to Troy."

We didn't take the back rud. We took the front rud, and we went fast. In a little while it began to rain. I just *love* clay roads. You know, I'm a sort of a mud lark.

We put on chains; yes, four of them, and for three sad hours went sloshing and skidding through a rural vale of tears.

Late that evening we arrived. In Troy!

I don't know *how* we got there, but we did. Perhaps the For-

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tune Fairies *wished* it on us; or maybe it was done by strategy, just as the Greeks got into ancient Troy by means of a wooden horse. And speaking of horses, remember that old humorist back yonder near Wappingers Falls? Well, I'd rather sleep with him, in his smelly stable, than to spend another night in Troy.

What's that? Oh, no. I have nothing against the town; but when you swear you won't go to a place, then suddenly come out of the dark and find yourself right in the middle of it, it makes you rather peevish. I oughtn't to complain, though. My owner bought me a new tail-


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light and had me laundered.

In the morning we left, on a wide, straight road, and we never stopped for lunch. We were afraid of getting back to Troy.

In leaving that town, I can give you a priceless tip. Take a wide, straight road, just as *we* did, and keep on going. If the road even *bears* to the right or left, don't follow it. You will save time by cutting through the fields and woods.

CHAPTER XII

HE sun was shining now and things looked a bit more cheerful. We were going north and were headed for the mountains. Billy had never negotiated a mountain, and I felt a trifle quaky in my crank case, that being, as nearly as I could judge, the region known as the pit of one's stomach.

However, I had one consolation. If we fell off from a very high place, my dissolution would be more sudden and complete, and therefore far less painful. I'm not a fanatic on Optimism. I *use* it. Just as I use my grease cups.

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About eighteen miles from Troy we stopped at a garage. Here Billy gave me a dose of oil. I didn't need it, but it showed that a germ was stirring in the vicinity of his mind. I actually began to entertain a *hope* for him; then, four miles further on, he dashed it—utterly.

They stopped to pick some wild flowers—golden rod—and I've hated it ever since. In stopping, our bridegroom put on my emergency with the strength of love, and squeezed my wheel drum as though it had been Ruth's waist. I didn't mind the squeezing; but he might, at least, have *released* my brake when we tried to start.



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He didn't. Billy's brain tank is of light capacity and has no gauge on it. It is the kind you poke a stick into and measure the wetness with your finger. As a rule the liquid was low. Today his tank was dry.

He threw out my clutch and set my engine going. He let in my clutch, and I went twelve feet in the manner of a drunken frog. Even then I might have pulled against my drag; but Billy slammed on the gas and choked me. I'm sorry, but I stalled.

He tried me again, and again I failed him. This time he tried to start with my shift in low gear. I bucked, and something

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inside me hissed. I don't know what it was myself, but I hope it was hissing Billy.

He looked at Ruth. Ruth looked at him. Clearly there was something wrong, and Napoleon got out and hunted for it. He examined my tires and found them properly inflated. No trouble there. He lit his pipe and investigated my speedometer. No trouble here. Then Ruth fished out her trait and offered a suggestion.

"Perhaps," she said, "if we pushed in *all* of its little buttons at the same time, then, *maybe*, we'd strike the right one."

Billy didn't think so. He felt that the seat of calamity was

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seated deeper. He came around in front and regarded me most thoughtfully. I knew it! I saw it coming as he was taking off his coat. He was going to operate. I could almost smell the chloroform.

He did it. Just the thing I knew he would. He raised up my hood and began to monkey with my carburetor.

"William," I tried to say, in a tone of forbearance and of due respect, "I don't want to criticise an owner; but I *do* want to tell you this: It is entirely possible for an engine to be made fool-proof, but not damn-fool proof!"

Do you think he listened?

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Not he! He paid the same attention to my remarks as he had to the position of my emergency brake, and the brutal work went on. He didn't know whether I needed gas or air, but there's nothing like experiment, especially in a pea-green jackass with as much imagination as that horse near Wappingers Falls.

He adjusted three of my set screws, to his perfect satisfaction, and presented me with a mixture that would have made an entire skunk family envious. Then he drifted joyously into the driver's seat and shot the juice into me.

I turned my engine over faithfully, obediently. I snorted once

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and back-fired. Then I sighed and went out of business.

Billy wanted to adjust my universal joints, but, thank God, he had lost his wrench. Our wife — dear, gentle soul — suggested that we sound the horn for help.

I was glad of this, not only because the suggestion was inspired, but because my batteries were now the only parts of me in working order.

We sounded the horn, and were rewarded. An angel of light, with a smutty face and a pair of greasy overalls, came rattling along in an Ingle-gojang of pre-historic vintage. The cherub responded to our S.

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O. S., descended from his rosy cloud and readjusted me.

"Now then," he said to Billy, after half an hour. "You can start her off."

This was the first time I had been alluded to as a *she*; but I didn't care. I didn't care *what* he called me. We started off. At least, I did my best.

"Hey there!" yelled the cherub. "Gosh darn you, *take off that brake!*" He came to my side and regarded Billy with a look of wondrous pity in his eye. "Say, you!" he observed, "*you* otten't to drive no car. What *you* otter do is to sell *sawsage!* In a *basement!* Where you couldn't fall out an' *bust* noth-


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in'." He turned to Ruth, with a somewhat milder tone, and touched his greasy cap. "Good-bye, lady. You better keep yer eye on 'im. Ef he gits vi'lent, lead him into Bugburg."

I *liked* that cherub. His observations possessed a certain tang of eloquence and vigor; yes, even though his diction *was* a trifle unconventional.

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CHAPTER XIII

FTER this we got on better. At least they did; not I. I wasn't happy. What? Oh, no, there was nothing wrong. Physically I was feeling fine and running smoothly. The trouble was with my heart.

You may not know it, but brides and grooms have a way of forgetting *everything*—except themselves. They even forget the chap who is *giving* them the trip, and is mainly responsible for most of the expenses.

Well, that's what they did to me. Forgot me! Kept taking their eyes off the road and put-

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ting them on each other. And the things those idiots said? Oh, Mommer! I wouldn't repeat them, not even to *you*, in confidence.

Billy was positively slushy; but some of the things Ruth said were beautiful. They did the groom lots of good; but they hurt *me* woefully, and made me feel that my carburetor wasn't working properly, though, maybe, it was the altitude.

You'll think, no doubt, my depression was caused by jealousy of Billy. Perhaps you are right, for I felt that if it wasn't for my Ruth, I would like to die. No, by Jupiter! I had a better

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plan. I *would* die! *With* her!
And I tried to do it.

We had come up a mountain and were going down on the other side. I was coasting. I had no heart to work. We were on a blasted road—yes, in both senses of the word. On the right were jagged rocks. On the left was the tempting brink of a declivity, with a peaceful valley far below, and there wasn't any road-rail.

Just at the moment of my gloomiest reflections, Ruth pulled something about "the lights and shadows that danced in the limpid depths of her Billy boy's dear, devoted eyes."

This was too much for *me*. I

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couldn't stand it. Besides, Billy had taken his dear, devoted eyes off the road, and I wasn't going to miss the opportunity. I didn't. I dived for the tempting brink!

Ruth grabbed my wheel and twisted it. Luckily she twisted it the right way. Otherwise you wouldn't be worrying over this biography.

Heigh-ho! That's always the way in this sad old life of ours. A chap can't even kill himself, when death would mean the sweetest end of all. He's just got to go on living—and listening to slush!

Was it Solomon or Solon who pulled that epigram about "two being company and three a

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crowd"? I'll bet they said it both together. It's too darned true for any one old geezer to have gotten it off alone.


What's that you say? Why, no! *I* haven't anything against brides and grooms, any more than I have against the town of Troy; but there *is* something on my chest. I'm going to get it off, if you don't mind, and ease my compression, so to speak.

It's this: If ever I go on *another* honeymoon, I'm going with a middle-aged widow and a widower, both of whom have owned and operated cars with some small and faintly fluttering degree of sanity.

Get it? Thank you.

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CHAPTER XIV

E scuffled along for two more days, till we came to a lake, and rested. It was here I was introduced to Kate and Peter. They were friends of Ruth's, married to each other for a long, long time, and were therefore normal.

I liked Kate. Not so much as I liked Ruth, of course; but—well, she never thrilled me when she sat on me. But as for Pete, I worshipped him! He was a natural born driver. I knew it the minute he stepped on my running board and shook hands with my passengers.

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The next thing he did was to run his hand over my hood to see if I were overheated. I was, with thanks to Billy. Pete sighed sadly and offered to look me over.

It's funny how you fall for a friend the moment you clap your lamps on him; but I didn't merely fall for Pete; I plunged. He was a big, easy-going, joyful sort of a cuss, who had as much consideration for a car as he had for his fishing tackle. If I had been a *she* car, instead of a *he* car, it is entirely possible that I might have gone on a *bridal* trip with Pete. By Jupiter, I might even have eloped!

We stayed at the lake three days, and went "joy-riding." I

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use the term advisedly, for that is what it was to *me*. It shot the electric juice of *hope* into my soul.

We put Ruth and Kate in the tonneau, and let 'em talk and talk and talk, about nothing in particular. Pete and Billy sat in front. Do you think Pete drove me? Not he, my son. He never touched my wheel. It was Billy who did the driving.

Now, possibly, you may think it curious that I speak of a "joy-ride" with our William at the helm of destiny; but, believe *me*, little one, that is just my point.

Pete sat beside him and talked horse sense. I don't mean the kind of horse sense one gets back



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yonder near Wappingers Falls. I mean *auto* horse sense. He didn't tell Billy what to do. He told him what *not* to do; and that, if you please, is just about the most important punching knuckle in the fist of life.

In a little while Billy was administering my gas in swallowable doses. What is more, he began to think with his feet. I mean by that that they were acting independent of his brain.

In Billy's case, I might say this was fortunate; but an auto doesn't harbor spleen for past performances. It serves you blindly, faithfully, and only asks consideration, gas, water, and a little oil.

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At any rate, Billy learned to shift without looking at the lever, to use my foot brake without ramming it through the floor, and to go into second the moment my engine began to labor. He also learned to listen to my voice. If anything went wrong, I'd tell him, and I'd tell him in a whisper. And another thing. Pete told him. I heard him tell it. It was this:

"Each car has its individual disposition, just as an owner has; but the car becomes aware of the owner's disposition much sooner than the owner knows the disposition of his car. If this were reversed, we'd have far fewer accidents."

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Get that? Some scout was good old Pete. He may never be our President in Washington; but if he's ever put up for the presidency of an amateur auto club, by Jove, you can bet he will get *my vote!* That is to say, if the ladies, by then, will permit a male to cast his ballot.

I *liked* that lake! It was a peaceful, restful sort of place, where a chap could dream, and plan for the touring days to come.

And Ruth was happy. That was the main point, anyway. It didn't matter whatever else might happen, so long as Ruth was happy and content.

And still, at night, it was lone-

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some in that barn—*darned* lonesome!

Even a bachelor has his moments of depression.

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CHAPTER XV

WELL, we left the lake. I didn't *want* to leave it, any more than I wanted to start back home and suddenly find myself in Troy. I still had hopes of getting a few more "NOTS" from Pete; but please don't consider me a hog. I'm *nearly* human, even if I *am* an auto.

Pete and Kate came down to the bottom of the hotel steps to see us off, so we kissed them and went away. I winked at Pete with my side lamp, but my winks were somewhat moist; and you can bet your fishing rods,

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old scout, I kept my tail light on you till I lost you around the curve.

We went away! Ah, me, it's a happy, sniffly sort of feeling when you start back home from your honeymoon. You want to cry; but, somehow, dear, you find your self all mixed up, and laugh.

That's what *we* did, anyway. The rest of that trip, as Ruth expressed it, was just one top-speed, joyful sort of blur. We had no trouble of any kind; not even a puncture. *I* saw to that myself. When I spied a nail, or a piece of broken glass, I just hopped over it—for Ruth.

I *did* want to see our Billy change another shoe; but, some-

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how, I couldn't bring myself to spoil the boy's delight. I liked that boy! I liked him from the first; though I've never fully understood how he ever got me into Troy.

Yet now he was getting *me*. He was getting *power* out of me, and getting *speed*; and, I tell you, I tried to show appreciation. I ran! I was feeling great! I felt as I did that first, sweet day when the profane young tester took me out, and I got the fat old rooster.

But oh, that homeward trip! Say, friend, are *you* married? What? Well, dang your ignorant and selfish buttons! Go hunt for a Ruth—and *find* her

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—quick! Your car will take care of the rest of it. You won't have to worry about a single thing—that is, if you have the means and brains.

We didn't worry. Not a bit. We were too contented. We loved each other; yes, all three of us, and, somehow, I couldn't flash one spark of jealousy. I wonder if my ignition was working as it should? Say, Solomon, and you too, brother Solon, there are times when three are *not* a crowd.

We ran together over hills, and coasted down the long, smooth grades beyond; then passed through cool, sweet valleys when the shadows fell. We

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skirted lakes and rivers, listening to the bell-birds singing in the dusk; and our hearts, like theirs, were glad. They ached with the peace and purity of it all, so we got mixed up again, and laughed.

And then we got back home. I don't like to talk about it exactly, but suppose I must; otherwise this wouldn't be a true biography. The incident made me feel a little lumpy in my intake valves.

We stopped, and our wife got out. She stood in front of me, with her head a trifle on one side—just as I had seen her first—and smiled. Then she wiped her eyes, put one hand

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on my radiator cap, and spoke to Billy.

"Darling," she said, "some day we may be the owners of other cars, better and of finer finish; but we'll never, *never* be more happy than we are in this."

Then she looked at *me!* Yes, full in the head-lights, and spoke again.

"You *dear!*" she said. "I love you, you dear old darling!"

She patted me on the hood, gently, with a lingering sort of touch good women have, and went into the house. I watched her, with all five eyes; yes, watched, till the door was closed. Then Billy took me around to a nice garage before I could make

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a blithering idiot of myself. Good old Billy! You know I always liked that boy. I liked him from the first.

Say, people! Remember that old temperance horse, up yonder near Wappingers Falls. Well, never mind. It doesn't matter. I'm tired and a trifle sleepy—and maybe you are, too. Good night.









